The One Path to Seventeen Aspirations

A Visual Journey Through the Buddha's Ākaṅkheyyasutta in Akkurat Pro

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If a Mendicant Might Wish...

The Buddha begins by addressing his community of mendicants near Sāvatthī. He presents a radical idea: that the highest spiritual goals, from communal harmony to ultimate liberation, are not matters of chance, but the direct results of a dedicated practice. The sutta unfolds as a series of aspirations, each one achievable through the same foundational discipline.

"Mendicants, live by the ethical precepts and the monastic code. ... Seeing danger in the slightest fault, keep the rules you've undertaken."

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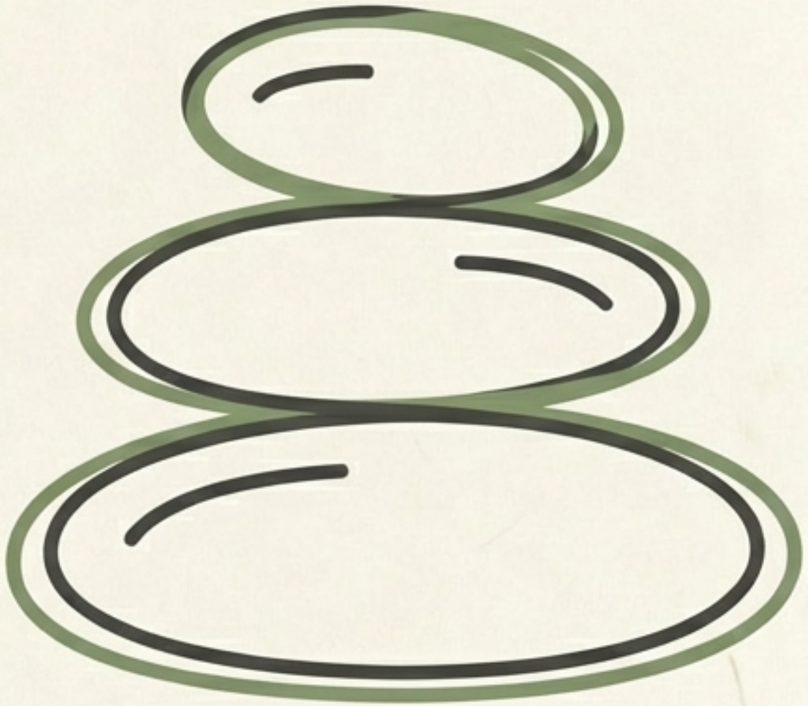
The Single Foundation for All Attainments



For each of the seventeen aspirations, the Buddha prescribes the same comprehensive path. This is the engine of transformation.

1. Fulfill Your Precepts
Live by the ethical precepts and monastic code.

2. Commit to Inner Serenity
Cultivate a calm and peaceful heart.

3. Do Not Neglect Absorption
Consistently practice deep meditation (jhāna).

4. Be Endowed with Discernment
Develop profound insight and wisdom (vipassanā).

5. Frequent Empty Huts
Seek solitude to deepen the practice.

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The Path Begins with a Virtuous & Supportive Life
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The first aspirations address the mendicant's relationship with their world. They focus on establishing the ideal conditions for practice: being respected by peers, receiving the four requisites for life, and ensuring one's practice is a source of good for others, both living and dead.

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Aspirations for a Harmonious Life

For Oneself

"May I be liked and approved by my spiritual companions, respected and admired."

For Support

"May I receive robes, almsfood, lodgings, and medicines and supplies for the sick."

For Supporters

"May the services of those whose...supplies I enjoy be very fruitful and beneficial for them."

For Family

"When deceased family and relatives...recollect me with a confident mind, may this be very fruitful and beneficial for them."

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The Practitioner Turns Inward to Conquer the Mind

Having established a stable outer life, the practice turns to the inner landscape. The next aspirations are to gain sovereignty over the primal forces of desire, discontent, fear, and dread——not by suppressing them, but by mastering them as they arise. This is the foundation of unshakable inner peace.

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Aspirations for Inner Sovereignty

Aspiration 1 (Desire & Discontent)

Wish:
"May I prevail over desire and discontent, and may desire and discontent not prevail over me."

Outcome:
"May I live having mastered desire and discontent whenever they arose."

Aspiration 2 (Fear & Dread)

Wish:
"May I prevail over fear and dread, and may fear and dread not prevail over me."

Outcome:
"May I live having mastered fear and dread whenever they arose."

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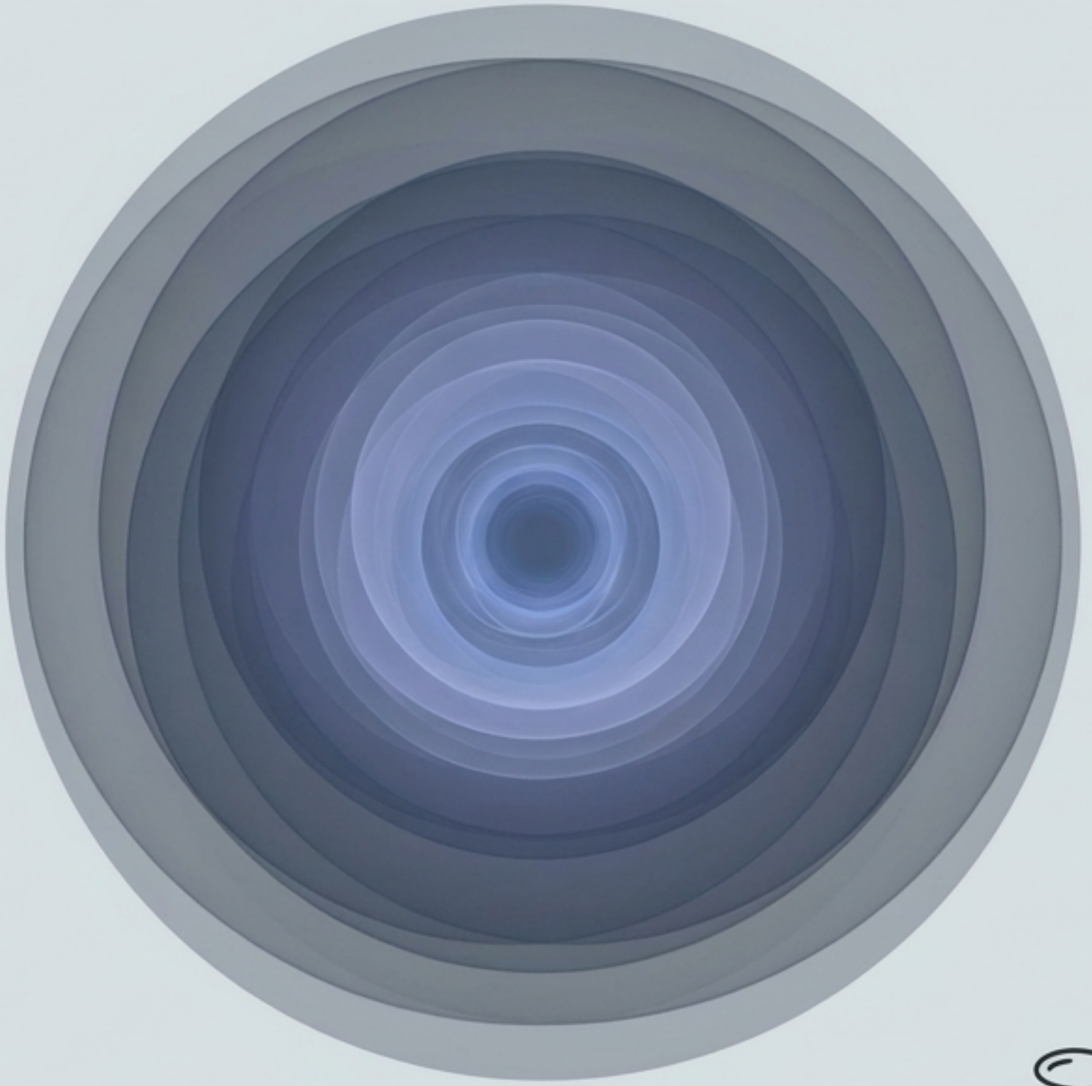
Exploring the Higher Mind and Formless Realms

With the mind mastered, the practitioner can now access profound states of meditative bliss at will. These are not fleeting moments of peace but stable, deep absorptions (jhānas) that belong belong to the ‘higher mind,’ and even experiences that transcend all form entirely.



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Aspirations for Meditative Attainment

The Four Absorptions

"May I get the four absorptions—blissful meditations in this life that belong to the higher mind—when I want, without trouble or difficulty."

The Formless Liberations

"May I have direct meditative experience of the peaceful liberations that are formless, transcending form."

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When a Purified Mind Perceives Beyond the Ordinary

As the mind achieves unparalleled clarity and stability, latent human potentials begin to awaken. The sutta describes a range of ‘psychic powers’ and forms of direct knowing that arise from this deep practice. These are not the goal, but signs of the path's transformative power.

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Aspirations for Transcendent Abilities

Psychic Powers

"May I wield the many kinds of psychic power: multiplying myself…going unobstructed through a wall…walking on water…flying cross-legged through the sky…touching and stroking with my hand the sun and moon…controlling the body as far as the realm of divinity."

Clairaudience

"With clairaudience that is purified and superhuman, may I hear both kinds of sounds, human and heavenly, whether near or far."

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Aspirations for Direct Knowing

1. Understanding Minds

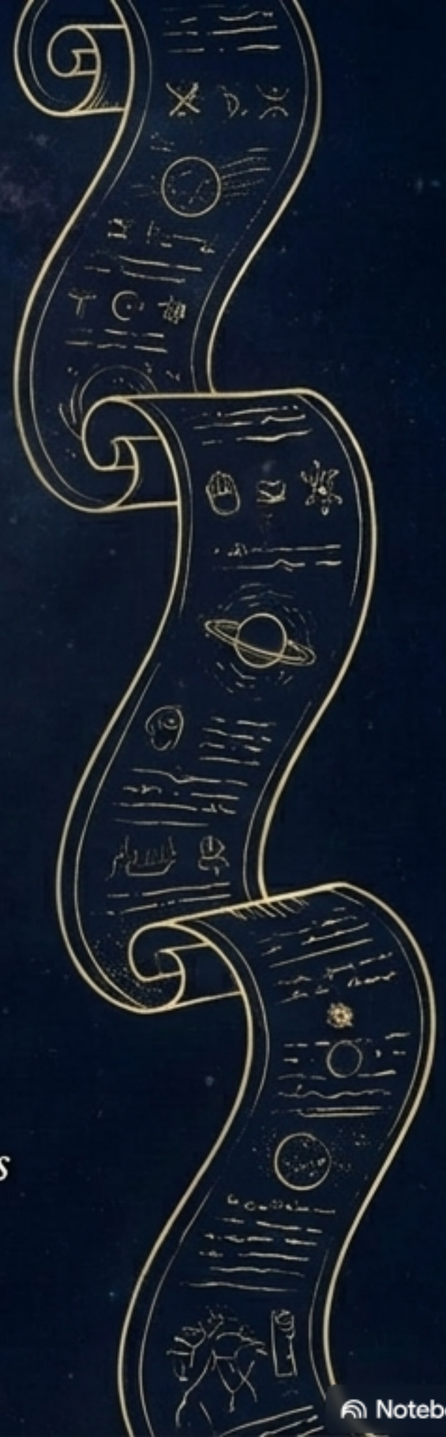
"May I understand the minds of other beings... mind with greed as 'mind with greed'... freed mind as 'freed mind', and unfreed mind as 'unfreed mind'." Garamond Premier Pro Italic

2. Recollecting Past Lives

"May I recollect many kinds of past lives... one, two... a hundred thousand rebirths... 'There, I was named this, my clan was that, I looked like this... When I passed away from that place I was reborn here.' May I thus recollect my many kinds of past lives, with features and details." in Garamond Premier Pro

3. The Divine Eye

"With clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, may I see sentient beings passing away and being reborn... and understand how sentient beings pass on according to their deeds." in Garamond Premier Pro Italic



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Stage V: The Summit of Liberation

The Final Goal: The End of All Fetters

The journey culminates in the very purpose of the spiritual life: the progressive and final stages of awakening. These are not merely experiences but fundamental, irreversible shifts in being, leading to the utter destruction of the mental defilements and the realization of Nibbāna.

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The Four Aspirations for Awakening

4. The Final Liberation

"May I realize the undefiled freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom in this very life... due to the ending of defilements."

3. Non-Returner

"...with the ending of the five lower fetters, be reborn spontaneously and become extinguished there, not liable to return from that world."

2. Once-Returner

"...and the weakening of greed, hate, and delusion, become a once-returner, coming back to this world once only, then making an end of suffering."

1. Stream-Enterer

"May I, with the ending of three fetters, become a stream-enterer, not liable to be reborn in the underworld, destined for awakening."

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The Path is the Goal

The journey from communal harmony to the vision of past lives, from inner peace to final liberation, is shown to spring from a single source. The practice is not a key that is used once and discarded, but very substance of the path at every stage.

'Mendicants, live by the ethical precepts and the monastic code. ...
Seeing danger in the slightest fault, keep the rules you've undertaken.'
That's what I said, and this is why I said it.'

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